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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

POSSIBILITIES OF WASHINGTON SOCIETY.

To A newcomer in Washington the social possibilities are delightfully suggestive. Where else, indeed, in our country are so many men of diverse powers congregated? And where else do such men mingle freely in society? They are of every shade of political opinion, of course, as well as representative of every interest in the country; for if the drawing-room is hardly as yet neutral ground, it offers a certain degree of hospitality to friend and to foe, and will do so with more and more cordiality, as it is realized that society, like patriotism, unites those whom politics divides.

To forward such harmony is to work in a good cause, and not only can this be done, but a true society can be formed which shall create and be created by a standard of taste wholesomely American. The foundation is already laid here as nowhere else in the United States for a society that shall include both sexes, the only kind worth having or that can be permanently maintained; a society that understands something of the importance of etiquette—a form of culture as necessary to good society as grammar is to language; a society, finally, in which persons one would go half across the continent to meet, rub shoulders with the humblest in the crush of a President's reception or at the house of a cabinet officer. But what is the result? One cannot deny that as yet it is entirely inadequate. Society as an end does not produce results commensurate with the means employed, and society as a means is not society in the true sense at all. It is, like any other transitory gathering at a theatre or hotel, without cohesion or significance. It gives birth to no *esprit de corps*, and failing in this any organization lacks persistence and loyalty. The individual simply loses his individuality and is merged in the mass, which becomes like a mush of grapes that have lost their wholeness as fruit and have not yet become wine.

At present, whatever lasts beyond the day of an entertainment is almost wholly of a utilitarian character. People must do this and that in order not to offend, in order to propitiate, in order to gain votes for the party or influence for a cause, or what not, that utilizes society for some other end than its own; whereas society should be the artistic product of a discriminating people, through the means of refined companionship.

This does not at all signify an attempt to imitate the French *salon*. One might as well try to revive the megatherium. The *salon* as France had it was a product of the times, which have changed in almost every detail since then. What America needs is a form of society that shall attract and preserve the best social material. Of course the form must be democratic, for that is the spirit of our age and people; but to be democratic does not signify that all men are alike either by nature or culture. Society cannot regard them, as the ballot does, solely from the standpoint of quantity; it must take cognizance also of quality. Green of Oxford is reported to have said

that to make every Englishman a gentleman was the aim of English civilization. This does not mean that the standard of what constitutes a gentleman should be lowered so as to admit every one without regard to his fitness, but that each one should be fit. The sharp retort of a lady on being asked to receive a boor who was praised for being "a diamond in the rough" might oftener be acted upon. "Then he should be cut," said she.

To be a gentleman is, however, within the power of almost every man. It does not mean to have wealth, nor to have power, nor to have even knowledge; in short, it is not having at all—it is being. A self-made man whose chief ambition it is to "represent" one or a hundred millions of dollars, or a hundred thousand votes, does not usually care to take the time and thought to make himself fit for presentation in society; though that a self-made man may be the truest gentleman is known through experience by most of us; and the method is ably shown in "John Halifax, Gentleman." On the other hand, a man of birth, education, and outward refinement should not be admitted in society if he can be impeached for conduct unbecoming a gentleman; and what is unbecoming is exactly what a true social standard must decide.

We need to cultivate strenuously a Greek sense of limits that shall know how to choose and refuse, and that shall not be afraid of choosing what is consistent with an enlightened conception of society as an end in itself, nor of refusing whatever conflicts with it. Any adequate standard must be based on character; not mental or moral character alone, but on the whole man or woman as he or she is. At present Washington society fritters away great opportunities, regardless of what might be achieved with a little thought and organized determination. Wealth, ostentation, political power, and the mere aggregation of numbers are fast suffocating the finer qualities of social life, fostering vulgarity, and blunting the sense of social taste. It is a delicate sense, and should be refined instead of dulled. To keep it pure and render it discriminating is no small part of patriotic duty, for the dangers of wealth and corruption are especially great to a republic.

The responsibility rests with the resident population of the capital. The society of official life is necessarily superficial, and impotent to make distinctions. It cannot choose whom it will exclude or receive, for officials are not only public servants, but are looked upon as public property. Moreover, they are here to-day and at the antipodes to-morrow, and can therefore have no adequate *esprit de corps*.

If, then, a dozen or twenty households, already well established, and possessors of both courage and a discriminating social taste, would form a league as quietly as might be to choose carefully whom they would invite and whom they would ignore, being guided solely by the motive of establishing a worthy social nucleus in the capital of the nation, they would create a permanent good, capable of growth and of incalculable refining and purifying influence on the future of the republic. It should base itself on a sound simplicity, so far as material things are concerned, in order that expense need be of little moment, and on an acute social sense of the congeniality of individuals and the temper of a gathering as a whole. It is said that in regard to eloquence the taste of the House of Commons is higher than that of the man of greatest taste within it. So it is with society. The refinement of attrition with equal minds, the wisdom that results from the blending of knowledge, the grace that comes from universal courtesy, and the easy assurance of those not afraid of committing a blunder—these are some of the gains such a social form would give to those capable of entering it. For it

should not be exclusive except of what would destroy it. It should be inclusive of all the good in the stream of people constantly flowing through the country. And what a stream this is to draw from ! No other city offers us such advantages. If the nucleus were permanent, those invited might shift without injury to the central idea ; and thus each turn of the political wheel would bring men of note from different parts of the nation who could be drawn in during their long or short tenure of office to brighten and enlarge the conservative brain of the organization ; a common consciousness, alive to all changing impressions, yet capable of retaining the good of them permanently in a way that would waste nothing, but, on the contrary create continually new and higher forms. Under such circumstances, each individual would have the opportunity of bringing forth his or her best by union with the highest social achievements of all. Whether blossom or fruit, it should be welcome, for fragrance and beauty have their place no less securely than flavor and nourishment. Indeed, as Anglo-Saxons we can be safely trusted to take care of our nourishment, but we need stimulation to bring sufficient beauty into our lives. Surely, however, we are old enough as a social whole to have grown beyond the simple needs of the infant—food and warmth. These we can get at almost any entertainment, as also the satisfaction of the savage, who adds to the infant's wants those of clothing and shelter. Such demands are undeniably primitive. Let us strive for something more adequate to our desires as civilized human beings,—intelligent conversation, the play of minds at ease, the delicacy of gentle breeding, which far from leaving diamonds in the rough, makes jewels of common stones.

L. B. HALSTED.

THE HUMAN AMŒBOID.

WHEN my friend awoke the morning after a night at the club and facetiously spoke of himself as a "demoralized community," he probably did not intend to give a scientific description of himself. But that is exactly what his time-honored witticism was : he was literally a demoralized community.

Each of the millions of individuals which make up the grand resultant known as my convivial friend has a life-history of its own ; each has its birth, followed by successive periods of growth, maturity, and decline, ending in death ; and the night's festivities at the club had their demoralizing effect upon each individually, as well as upon the community collectively.

There is a scientific foundation for the town of Mansoul to rest upon that the Bedford Tinker never dreamed of in all his wonderful dreaming. Those embattled walls, with their eye-gate, their ear-gate, and all their other gates, the dwellings, strongholds, streets, alleys, and crowded population within, are more than the baseless fabric of a dream.

The individual in the microcosmic community is the amœboid cell. When it begins its life as a white blood-corpuscle, it is scarcely distinguishable from that little creature so familiar to the microscopist, the amœba. It swims along in the hæmal river, like a little fish in the Mississippi, in quest of food, oxygen, and its final destiny. What that destiny is to be there is nothing about it as yet to determine. As there is no telling whether a particular infant is to become doctor, lawyer, merchant, or priest, president or hod-carrier, so there is no telling in what sphere of usefulness this little creature may settle when it has finished its career of independent roaming. It may rise to a seat in the House of Lords, on the Supreme Bench, or in the